

Extracts.

Mr. Forster's Life of Dickens.

Mr. John Forster has a right to be the biographer of Charles Dickens, and he has many qualifications for the discharge of that duty. No one had a more intimate knowledge of the man, and few have a better insight into his character and genius. Living in the closest friendship with Dickens for thirty years, no one certainly had better opportunities for becoming acquainted with the great humorist whose life we still explore. Nor in respect to appreciation for Dickens's work and sympathy with his spirit is Mr. Forster deficient. Having so near his home as he did, he has lost nothing of due reverence. Without suffering his judgment to be biased by any feeling of friendship, he is able to be genial and hearty in his remarks above all—and this is the chief merit of his book, and the reason why it serves a just mean respect due to the memory of the deceased and the confidence which the world of readers has a right to claim from the biographer. There is no needless blazoning of trivial facts merely done that.

The many-headed beast should know.

And to prove the great author may be in little things only as level with ordinary mankind. In this part of Dickens's life there is indeed not much demand for the virtues of reticence, for the incidents are few and of a nature which may be told without prejudice either to the fame of his hero or the biographer's duty. Mr. Forster's loyalty to the memory of his friend, together with his well-timed judgment, has kept him free from the ordinary errors of biographers. He tells us only so much of Dickens's life as is necessary to understand the development of his character and to explain the sources of his inspiration, and this is the only true method of literary biography. Yet no one will complain of this book on the score of meagreness or baldness. A large portion of the story is told, and as it is from undoubted sources, it is most valuable for the study of the origin and growth of Dickens's literary character.

The leading facts in the life of Dickens are already well known, and need not be recapitulated. That he was the son of a clerk in the Navy Pay Office; that his father was a bankrupt, improvident, and necessitous; that his education was a severe and early life passed in a crowded and hard-ship and privation; with all this we have been familiar. Mr. Forster adds some new particulars not creditable to the elder Dickens, whose portrait he bids us identify with his son's Mr. Micawber. The impressions, and many of the details, of Charles Dickens's own early life are to be found in David Copperfield. The story is told in a way which was actually written as chapters of an autobiography. Before he was eight years old Charles Dickens had written a tragedy founded on one of the "Tales of the Genii," and used to be set on chairs and tables to sing comic songs. "When he first told me of this," writes Mr. Forster, "he said he never recalled it, that his own shrill little voice of childhood did not come back to him, and he blushed to think what a horrible little nuisance he must have been to many unfeeling grown-up people who were called upon to admire him." He made at this early age the acquaintance of "Foderick Ransom," "Tom Jones," "Don Quixote," "Robinson Crusoe," the "Tales of the Genii," and "David Copperfield," as he has written in "David Copperfield." At the age of ten he was removed from Chatham to London, and encamped in Bayham-street, Camden Town. It was one of the crises in the elder Dickens's fortunes, and the earliest impressions formed by the son of this part of his life were of his father's intricate money involvements. Here it was, when scarcely beyond the period of infancy, he began to learn in that hard school of life the lessons of his genius, and to much prefer to play after years. It was indeed, the only school available to him, for either from the poverty or the carelessness of his parents, his education was suffered to lapse, while he fell into a position of almost menial servitude. Of his father, he said afterwards to Mr. Forster:

"I know my father to be as kindhearted and generous as any ever lived in the world. Ever, I think that I can remember of his conduct to his wife, or children, or friends, in sickness or affliction, is beyond all praise. By me, as a sick child, he has watched night and day, unwearyingly and patiently, many nights and days. He never undertook any business, charge, or trust, that he did not zealously, conscientiously, punctually, honourably discharge. His father was always untruthful. He was proud of me in his way, and had a great admiration of the comic stings. But, in the case of his temper and the strictness of his means, he appeared to have utterly lost at this time the idea of educating me at all, and to have utterly put from him the notion that I had any claim upon him, in that regard, whatever. So I degenerated into a child and making myself useful in the work of the little house, and looking after my younger brothers and sisters (we were now six in all); and going on such poor errands as arose out of our poor way of living."

The fortunes of the family having fallen to their lowest ebb, it was resolved, in consideration of the old Indian connection, and that the people in India always sent home their children to be educated to a school, and a house was taken in Government, with a large brass plate, which announced "Mrs. Dickens's Establishment."

"I left," wrote Dickens to Mr. Forster, "at a great many other doors a great many circulars, calling attention to the merits of the establishment. Yet nobody ever came to school, nor do I recollect that anybody ever proposed to come, or that the least preparation was made to receive anybody. But I know that we got on very badly with the butcher and baker, that very often we had not too much for dinner, and that at last my father was arrested."

It was from his intercourse with his father in the Marshalsea that Dickens derived that minute experience of prison life of which he made such touching and humorous use in "Pickwick," "Little Dorrit," and "David Copperfield." Mentioning the family reduced to the greatest straits, and even the little store of books which he had (and the only solace of the little lad) had to be pawned. But even worse days came, for a description of which we are referred to the early struggles of David Copperfield. The experiences of David in the establishment of Marshalsea and the Marshalsea are an exact transcript of the life of Charles Dickens at the age. A cousin of Mrs. Dickens had started a blacking manufactory, and the youthful Charles was offered a place as a corder and packer of blacking bottles. Of this episode in his life, now for the first time made public, Charles Dickens gave the following account to Mr. Forster:

"It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age. It is wonderful to me that, even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion enough on me—a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily or mentally—to suggest that something might have been spared, as certainly it might have been, to place me at any common school. Our friends take it very much to heart. No one made any sign. My father and mother were quite satisfied. They could hardly have been more."

The Life of Charles Dickens, By John Forster. Vol. I., Chapman and Hall.

Insurance.

DRESDEN INSURANCE COMPANY FOR SEA, RIVER, AND LAND TRANSPORT.

THE undersigned having been appointed General Agents in China for the above Company, are prepared to accept risks and issue policies of insurance at the current rates of Premium.

CARLOWITZ & Co.,
General Agents in China.
6th 2193 Hongkong, 15th December, 1871.
NOTICE.

IMPERIAL FIRE OFFICE.

FROM and after this date the following rates will be charged: SHORT PERIOD INSURANCE, viz—

Not exceeding 1 month 1/2 of the annual rate

Above 1 month 1/2 of the annual rate

Above 3 months 1/2 of the annual rate

Above 6 months 1/2 of the annual rate

Above 12 months 1/2 of the annual rate

GIHL, LIVINGSTON & Co.,
Agents, Imperial Fire Insurance Company,
4th 675 Hongkong, 13th August, 1869.

MANCHESTER FIRE ASSURANCE COMPANY OF MANCHESTER AND LONDON.

THE undersigned having been appointed Agents for the above Company at Hongkong, Canton, Foochow, Shanghai, and Hankow, and are prepared to grant Insurance at Current Rates.

HOLLIDAY, WISE & Co.,
11 1358 Hongkong, 15th October, 1868.

THE LIVERPOOL AND BOMBAY TRADING INSURANCE COMPANY.

THE undersigned having been appointed Agents for the above Company at this place, are prepared to grant Policies against Marine Risks at current rates.

HOLLIDAY, WISE & Co.,
4th 777 Hongkong, 25th April, 1870.

THE LONDON ASSURANCE COMPANY INCORPORATED BY ROYAL CHARTER.

HIS MAJESTY KING GEORGE THE FIFTH, A.D. 1870.

THE undersigned having been appointed Agents for the above Corporation, are prepared to grant Insurance as follows—

1. FIRE INSURANCE, viz—

Not exceeding 1 month 1/2 of the annual rate

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